

Coordinating the Atlantis Grand Opening Event

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Part I: Introduction

While working as the marketing intern for Kennedy Space Center's (KSC) Center Planning and Development Directorate (CPD), I was given the opportunity not only to learn new skills and expand my work experience under the powerful influence of NASA, but I also was given the opportunity to prove that I am an individual capable of contributing to the KSC team. My main responsibility while working in CPD was to organize and run a booth that represented the entire directorate at the Grand Opening of the Shuttle Atlantis exhibit during the weekend of June 28-30. This event was important for CPD because as a Directorate that markets KSC's facilities, technical capabilities and technologies to potential partners, it is important to attend all events and use them to gain an understanding of our audience. Although we catered mostly to the general public during this event, it was still important to reach out to the larger space enthusiast community and let them know about KSC's future plans to become a multi-user spaceport and that technology is still being developed.

Part II: Preparation

In order to efficiently execute setting up a display booth for CPD at this event, I went through a number of steps. Each one showed me a little more about the governmental machine that KSC needs to operate through to complete even the simplest of tasks.

I started my project by sending multiple e-mails to all of CPD asking for volunteers to support the booth for several hour shifts. Everyone working the event had to be a member of CPD since they are knowledgeable about our activities. I took everyone that replied to my initial e-mail and organized them into a cohesive schedule. After several rounds of follow-up e-mails I still did not have enough volunteers. I asked my mentor for advice and put out a physical sign-up sheet in the front office, then let everyone know it was there. Finally after two weeks, I had enough volunteers. I took my list of names and followed instructions to communicate the number of volunteers to the visitor's center, which was in charge of the event as a whole.

After sending out the list, I contacted all of the volunteers and scheduled a meeting in which I could brief everyone on what to expect during the event. I did some research and put together a presentation for the meeting that briefed the fourteen volunteers on what they would be doing and saying. I developed and gave them an “elevator speech” to memorize for the event and I went through each of the hand-outs so they would have an idea on what they would need to know. It consisted mostly of how to interact with non-NASA people. It turned out to be part briefing, part pep-talk.



Fig 1: PowerPoint meeting slides

Another step that I took was creating new hand-outs to add to our repertoire. I researched and wrote a map that included a brief description of each of the twelve different displays that were held in conjunction with Center Planning and Development. These twelve booths all presented different technologies that NASA is developing. This map was handed out to the public as a way for them to understand what each piece of technology did. It turned out to be our most important hand-out for the event and was given to every party that passed through our area.



Kennedy Space Center's innovators are proud to showcase some of NASA's newest technologies. They have been working hard to make spaceflight and Earth life more efficient and comfortable. Feel free to look around and ask questions!

- 1 **Center Planning and Development** is building partnerships and launching dreams. Kennedy is America's legacy spaceport providing unique facilities, technical capabilities and cutting-edge technologies to both commercial and government partners. Find out what partnerships are moving us closer to becoming a multiuser spaceport.
- 2 **The Unity Tool:** This tool was designed to give NASA the ability to interface with complex NASA simulations, display metadata information

www.nasa.gov

as desired and collaborate with remote partners.

- 3 **3-D Lightning:** Lightning is beautiful but dangerous. By putting on the glasses at this display, you can view stereoscopic 3-D video of lightning images filmed at and around Kennedy Space Center.
- 4 **Veggie:** Gardening in space is an idea that is very close to being a reality. The vegetable production system is a deployable plant growth system that may produce salad-type crops to provide the crew with a tasty, nutritious, and safe source of fresh food.
- 5 **3-D Laser Scanner:** Movies aren't the only thing moving into the 3-D world. See how NASA is using 3-D laser scanning and printing to do everything from understanding and

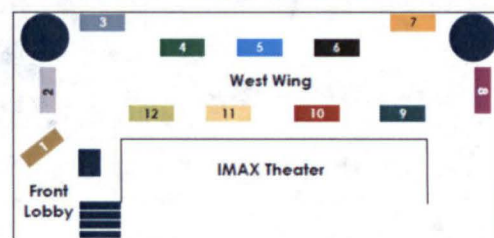
simulating extraterrestrial terrain to assisting the Mars rover as it maps out the red planet.

- 6 **Damage Detection:** The ability to detect damage on flat surfaces, such as the exterior structure of an inflatable planetary module, is of great interest to NASA. The damage detection system provides real-time data regarding the health of the inflatable shell and information related to the location and depth of impact damage.
- Corrosion:** KSC's Corrosion Technology Laboratory is developing a smart, self-healing coating that can detect and repair corrosion at an early stage. This coating is being developed using microcapsules specifically designed to deliver the contents of their core right as corrosion starts.
- Green Solvents:** The green initiative has swept the world and Kennedy Space Center is no different. Working with alternative chemicals and using various methods, our innovators are working to create environmentally-friendly products.
- 7 **Shuttle Launch:** Using the same stereoscopic technology as the 3-D lightning, check out a 3-D space shuttle launch in all its glory.
- 8 **Craig Technologies:** Bringing a project from concept to reality can be a challenge. Craig Technologies specializes in making innovative concepts a reality. Their 161,000-square-foot Aerospace and Defense Manufacturing Center features over 2,000 pieces of unique

manufacturing, avionics, test equipment and specialty labs.

- 9 **RESOLVE:** Water on the other planets may sound far-fetched, but our KSC innovators think there's something to it. This machine has been created to help uncover ice on other planetary surfaces. With access to new water sources, NASA will be able to further its research on the reusable qualities of H₂O in spaceflight.
- LED lighting:** Working under fluorescent lights will give any person a headache, but imagine not being able to escape from them. KSC innovators are working with LED technology to create new lighting systems for space.
- 10 **Dust Shields:** Tracking extraterrestrial sand into a spacecraft is a serious problem. Discover how KSC innovators are developing dust shields to help repel the sand and prevent it from being tracked into a spacecraft after astronauts have a walk on other planetary surfaces.
- 11 **RASSOR:** The Regolith Advanced Surface Systems Operations Robot is a uniquely designed mining machine. Digging into planets without any gravity can be difficult, but our KSC innovators are up to the challenge with this heavy duty robot.
- 12 **Heat Shields:** Repairing a spacecraft when it is in mid-voyage is difficult and dangerous. See how NASA is working to develop methods for creating new, lasting heat shields out of extraterrestrial soil, making it more convenient and efficient to repair a spacecraft in orbit.

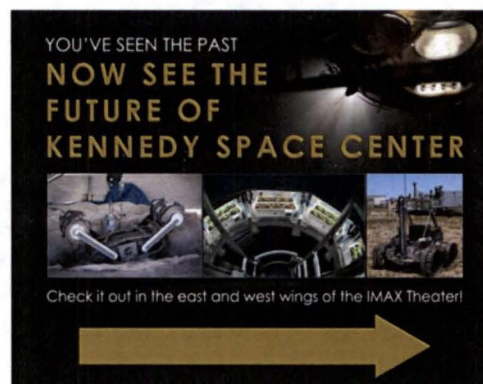
For more information, visit <http://technology.ksc.nasa.gov> and <http://kscpartnerships.ksc.nasa.gov>



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Fig²: Display map front and back

I also designed several signs, from which one was chosen to be displayed during the event. The sign directed people towards our area inside the IMAX Theater. I designed the slogans and worked closely with the graphics department to make the signs interesting. They were designed to be similar to the map above.



Fig²: Poster for event

The last hand-out that I created for this event was something that I approached my mentor about. I had the idea for a QR code that people could take and put in their wallets to find

later. I created a smaller business card size hand-out. It was a new QR code designed just for this event. Originally it was supposed to be a link to a video that represents CPD and KSC, but after working with IT, I realized that the video could not be put online in time for the event. As a compromise, the card still had a QR code but it simply lead to the CPD website and was one more item people had to get information about us.



Fig⁴: QR Code hand-out

Part III: The Event

This event took place during the weekend of June 28-30. Friday was a V.I.P. only night from 6-10 PM, with over 2,000 VIPs that were expected to attend. That night, however, turned out to be far from productive. Our booth was placed under an awning outside and there was one of the technology booths with us. When trying to market KSC to potential partners, these VIPs could have opened a number of business doors. However, due to several deterrents, we were unable to have many discussions about partnerships. When we first arrived, the weather was becoming worrisome and many of the other tables were packing up and leaving. We were still optimistic about the evening, but when a lightning warning was announced the visitor center began bussing the VIPs over to the Atlantis exhibit, therefore they did not pass our area. The few people who did choose to walk to Atlantis had very little interest in slowing down to hear what we had to say as they rushed to see the exhibit. In addition to all of this, by the second hour into the event, we were the only booth left standing. Even our technology booth had decided to pack

up. During Friday night, we were able to talk and give information to only about thirty people. Around the three and a half hour mark, we packed up our booth and headed home.

Saturday and Sunday both began at 9 AM and went until 7PM. My mentor and I both arrived early to set up the table for our booth. We set up the hand-outs in an appealing fashion and walked around the technology booths to get acquainted with what we would be leading the crowds towards. There were a few booths that caught my attention, so I bookmarked them and used them to lure in people walking by our booth. The Space Life Science Lab's booth had a whole array of items they were working on, the most interesting of which was the VEGGIE. Plant life in space is fascinating and I was sure to use that as a key selling point. The CPD section was set up in the air conditioned, IMAX Theater West. All twelve of the booths were ready to "wow" the general public and our head CPD booth poised to hand-out information. This was a chance to present myself as an informed NASA employee and get people excited about what Kennedy has coming in the future.

Our booth was set up in the west wing of the IMAX Theater. This meant that as movie goers exited the theater, they spilled out into our booth. One of the main challenges of working in this area was trying to get people to continue walking into our section after the movie instead of moving back outside. One of the ways we pulled people in was by setting up a strategy of volunteers standing in strategic locations and handing out both maps and NASA plastic bags. It may be silly but tourists love anything with a NASA logo on it, so the bags were a big help when trying to get people to come into our section.

One of the other factors that helped get people into our section was the rain. The afternoons of Saturday and Sunday it poured down rain and when that happened more people were persuaded to come and look at our booths. Unlike Friday night, when the rain had driven people away, it was one of our biggest helpers on Saturday and Sunday.

The second most challenging aspect of managing this event was overseeing the volunteers shift changes. Every time that a new volunteer showed up for their shift, I would walk through each of the hand-outs, and then send them with a map to go look at the different technology booths. Once they were acquainted, I would have them talk to one of the guests and deliver the elevator speech that had been in the briefing. I kept my schedule with me at all times so that I could see who was supposed to be showing up and when the people present should leave. Some people were scheduled to work for only two hours and some were supposed to work for up to six hours. The volunteers who were scheduled for longer shifts were given an opportunity to go see the Atlantis Exhibit. These breaks, in conjunction with making sure that everyone working was able to break and eat lunch were very stressful at first. I had four people scheduled at all times plus my mentor and myself working the whole day. It was a challenge coordinating everyone, but seeing as the IMAX let out every 45 minutes; it was not hard to give breaks when it was slow.

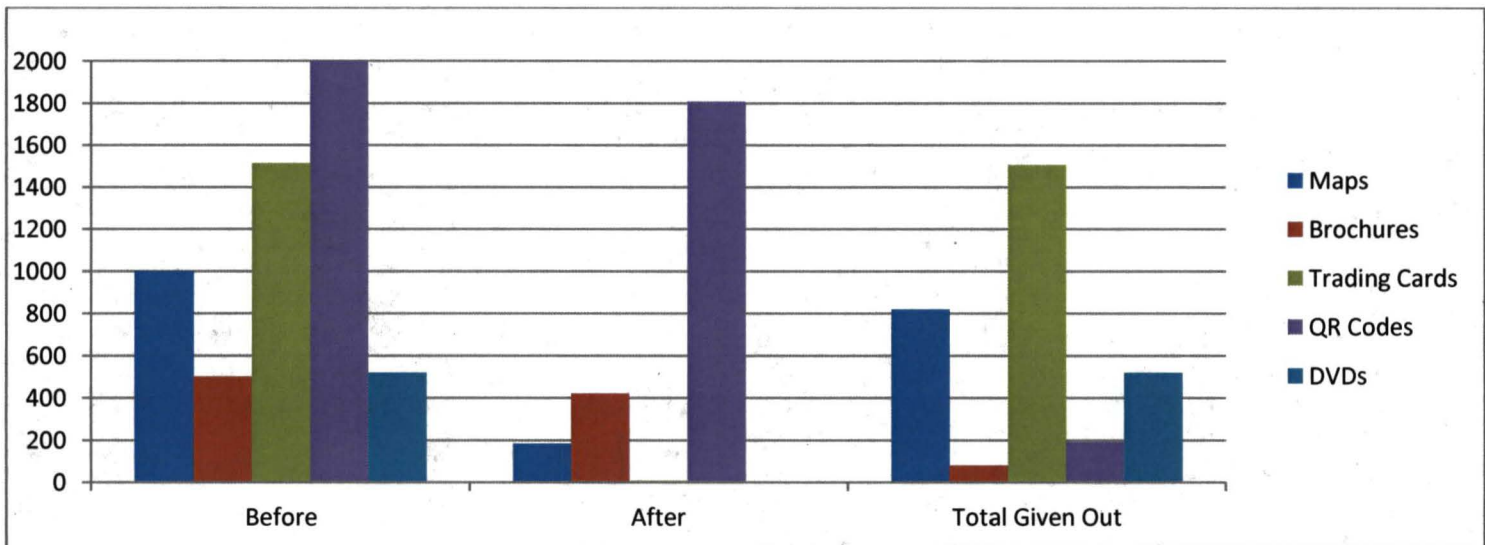
Part IV: Metrics

As a part of this event, CPD was hoping to get information on what are the best ways to get the attention of the general public. As part of the effort to get out information about Kennedy's future and CPD, we gave out a variety of marketing materials, including those that I had designed. With this wide array, we were able to get an understanding of what people were most drawn to.

Both before and after this event, I counted out each and every one of the different hand-outs. With this numeric information, CPD was able to gain some metrics and be better educated on what kind of hand-outs should be created for future events.

During the Atlantis Grand Opening we handed out five different items: maps with descriptions of each of the booths, brochures with information about Center Planning and Development, trading cards that feature six different facilities open for partnerships, QR codes

with information about CPD's website and DVDs that feature what is coming for Kennedy Space Center in the future and how CPD is involved in gaining partnerships. The following shows what people were drawn towards the most:



Fig⁵: Metrics of different hand-outs

With these metrics alone, CPD was able to see that over 1,000 members of the general public were reached during the event on Saturday and Sunday. We were also able to see that people liked the trading cards and DVDs best. There were other hand-outs that technology office provided, so we were unable to gain any metrics from those, but one of the hand-outs they supplied was a large "Spin Off" book. Even without counting, we could still tell that the Spin-offs were one of our most popular hand-outs. People were drawn not only to their size, but to the glossy pages filled with interesting pictures of technology and information.

Part V: Next Time

There are several lessons that I learned from being in charge of the Center Planning and Development booth at the Atlantis Grand Opening Event. Coordinating large groups of people was something that I had prior experience; however, coordinating a group that consisted of individuals who are almost all older than me and my superiors, was a task I had never done before. Being in charge and getting things done how I needed them, yet not overstepping any

boundaries was a careful line I learned to dance around. Overseeing the breaks given and the changing of the volunteers was also a challenge, but once I got the breaks timed with the movies, it became easier to adjust everyone as needed.

If I were to run another of these events, there are only a few things that I would do differently. For one, I would be sure to take inventory on *all* of the hand-out items so that we could get a better grasp on the metrics. I would also be sure to have more trading card, DVD and Spin Off type hand-outs, since these drew people in and made them ask questions about CPD. The last thing I would try to figure out is a more effective system for counting the number of people that came into our section. Using the hand-outs as a rough estimate is okay, but it would be nice to have a more exact count.

Over all, I found that the changing of the volunteers and working with people who are both older and more experienced than me were challenges that got easier as the event went on. Having the confidence to get things done the way they needed to be done, despite who I am working with, was something I simply had to do, not learn. I feel that if I did an event where there were not such long breaks in between visitors, it would be more of a challenge, but for this event it all worked its self out with ease.

Part VI: Conclusion

This experience gave me a great opportunity to test my organizational, leadership and problem solving skills. All of the steps that I went through in order to put the event together showed me what working for a government organization, or any organizational structure, was like.

I have gained skills that will help me as I leave the academic world and move into the business world. Both my people skills and my work ethic have been improved from this experience and I am grateful to have had this opportunity to work on such an important project for Center Planning and Development.